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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: INDIA: JESUITS SEE RISING HINDU FUNDAMENTALISM

REF: VATICAN 1299

1. (U) SUMMARY: Father Lisbert D'Souza, South Asia Regional Director at the Jesuit Curia in Rome said February 16 that recent attacks against Christians in India were motivated by increasing Hindu fundamentalism. D'Souza distinguished between simple banditry and religiously motivated attacks, and also highlighted the dangers of aggressive proselytism on the part of some Christian denominations. End Summary.

Hindu Fundamentalists behind Anti-Christian attacks

2. (SBU) According to Father D'Souza, Catholics in India are experiencing greater problems now than in the past, in part due to the attitude of Indian authorities. In the past, Catholics had often found allies among Indian police and government officials, many of whom had been educated in Jesuit or other Catholic institutions. "If we called the police and said, these guys are harassing us, they'd respond." Today, D'Souza said, fewer of those in power have these Christian connections, so past sensitivity to concerns of Christian minorities has given way in many cases to resentment and suspicion. When it comes to protecting religious minorities, D'Souza claimed, "the local governments do nothing."

3. (SBU) Despite his concerns about increasing violence against Christians, D'Souza said it is important to recognize that some of the attacks against Christians that are often perceived as religiously motivated are actually simple banditry. Convents and religious institutions are known as soft targets, he explained. In the North of India where banditry is a problem, everyone is a target regardless of religious affiliation. However, D'Souza said that in the more stable South of the country, attacks on Christians are more likely to have a religious motivation. In fact, Bombay's Auxiliary Bishop, Percival Fernandez, in a recent interview with Catholic media, supported D'Souza's contention that recent anti-Christian attacks have been coordinated by fundamentalist Hindu groups.

Provocative Proselytism?

4. (SBU) D'Souza recognized that some attacks on Christians may be a by-product of aggressive proselytism on the part of some Christian groups. "Evangelical Christian groups have not always been prudent," he observed, and have evangelized aggressively. D'Souza pointed out that the February 13 attack in Kerala on Pentecostal seminarians was likely due to the students' distributing Christian literature and proselytizing.

5. (SBU) While not downplaying reports of violence against Catholics and other Christians, D'Souza cautioned that Christian religious freedom watchdogs should not ignore persecution of other minorities. "Perhaps we have been too energetic in our own cause," highlighting abuses against Christians rather than keeping a broader watch on violations of the liberty of all religious minorities, he said.

Privatization of Education Raises Tuition

6. (SBU) Turning to Jesuit schools, D'Souza discussed challenges his order is facing due to the privatization of education in India. He blamed this trend for sapping government funding from religious schools. If Jesuit institutions want to attract elite students and continue to provide top-level education, they must increase investment in infrastructure and technology, D'Souza reasoned. Unfortunately this investment requires higher tuition costs that shut out poorer applicants, a group the Jesuits have traditionally regarded as their main constituency.

Comment

17. (SBU) As the South Asian Section Assistant at the Jesuit Curia in Rome, D'Souza advises Jesuit Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach -- the so-called "Jesuit Pope" -- on both administrative and political aspects of Jesuit presence in Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Although raised in Mumbai, D'Souza's family is Goan. Before moving to the Jesuit Curia in Rome D'Souza was Provincial of India and president of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia. There are currently 3,900

Jesuits in India.

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